

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5559

As of March 4, 2009

Title: An act relating to increasing hunting safety.

Brief Description: Increasing hunting safety.

Sponsors: Senators Kohl-Welles, Jacobsen, Regala and Fraser.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 2/02/09, 2/19/09 [DPF].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Staff: Karen Epps (786-7424)

Background: A recreational license issued by the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is required to hunt for classified wildlife in Washington. When purchasing a hunting license, persons under the age of 18 must present certification of the completion of a course of instruction of at least ten hours in the safe handling of firearms, safety, conservation, and sportsmanship. Hunter education courses focus on the topics of firearms and outdoor safety, wildlife management, and hunter responsibility.

Prior to 1994 hunters under the age of 14 were required to be accompanied by a parent, guardian, safety instructor, or other approved adult when they were in possession of a firearm for the purposes of hunting or target practice. Currently, there is no minimum age requirement when purchasing a hunting license or for enrollment in a hunter's education course.

Summary of Bill: A hunter under the age of 16 must be accompanied by a Washington-licensed hunter who has held a hunting license for the prior three years and is over the age of 18 when hunting for wild birds and animals. The accompanying adult hunter must stay within a range that permits continual unaided visual and auditory communication.

Subject to appropriation, DFW and the Department of Natural Resources must post signs that include information about hunting seasons on its lands that are used for both recreation and hunting.

Appropriation: None.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 2, 2009.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill is designed to protect both the hunters and the recreationalists. Without exception, people believe there should be supervision of youth hunters. The more recent a youth's experience is with hunter education, the more retention there will be about what was learned in hunter education. Currently, about 60 percent of those taking hunter education courses purchase a hunting license within the first year after taking the class. It is not the intention of this bill to limit the Second Amendment. Agencies should post signage about hunting in popular recreation areas within available resources. Youth will benefit from an adult's wisdom when hunting accompanied.

OTHER: It makes sense to bring the accompaniment age back at 14, the level it was prior to the inadvertent removal from the statute. There is concern about the costs to DFW in having to maintain a user-friendly website. Public safety is a two-way street and it may make sense to require recreationalists to wear blaze orange.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Kohl-Welles, prime sponsor; Kindra Ramos, Washington Trails Association; Mik Mikitik, DFW.

OTHER: Ed Owens, Hunters Heritage Council.